

**Council on Postsecondary Education**  
**January 30, 2006**

## **Mandatory Placement Report**

Ensuring that Kentucky's college students have the skills they need to succeed requires close collaboration between P-12, adult, and postsecondary education. The Council report, *Underprepared Students in Kentucky: A First Look at the 2001 Mandatory Placement Policy Implications for Kentucky's Public Postsecondary Education Policy*, summarizes the preparation level of the fall 2002 freshmen and their subsequent placement and retention patterns. This is the first review of the placement of underprepared students as mandated in Section 6 Assessment and Placement of the Kentucky administrative regulation (13 KAR 2:020) Guidelines for Admission to the State-supported Postsecondary Education Institutions. The complete report is now available on the Council's Web site at <http://cpe.ky.gov/research/special>. The executive summary highlighting the main findings is attached to this agenda item.

The findings indicate that there is substantial room for improvement in preparing and serving academically underprepared students in the public postsecondary institutions. Specifically, 54 percent of students who entered certificate and degree programs at Kentucky's public institutions of postsecondary education in fall 2002 were underprepared for college-level study in math, English, or reading. KCTCS had very high rates of underprepared entering students – 76 percent overall, compared to 39 percent of those entering four-year institutions. Student preparation has implications for degree production since underprepared students were twice as likely to drop out of any postsecondary institution as prepared students. Because of data limitations, the figures of remediation course-taking by underprepared students are low. It is important to note that this first look report tracked first-time students entering in fall 2002, and some institutions have made substantial changes in their remediation policies since the academic year covered in this report.

The Council staff is using the release of the report as an opportunity to re-engage education partners in a conversation about meeting the needs of students who enter college underprepared for college-level work. The following list of implications for postsecondary education policy was drafted as a starting point for discussion with the Quality and Accountability Policy Group and the Council of Chief Academic Officers. These suggested policies encompass both the preparation of college applicants and the support needed for enrolled undergraduates.

- Align high school graduation and adult education requirements with the skills needed for postsecondary success, using the standards developed by the American Diploma Project and contained within the Kentucky Statewide Public Postsecondary Placement Policy in English and Mathematics approved by the Council in November 2004.

- Minimize achievement gaps between racial-ethnic groups at all levels.
- Create a single, rigorous, high school curriculum that prepares all students for postsecondary education and the skilled workplace.
- Create a P-12 assessment system that tracks how well individual students are progressing toward college readiness, starting in middle school.
- Ensure that all underprepared students entering college receive the supplemental instruction they require to succeed.
- Work with institutions to improve remediation strategies, including student assessment and advising, registration, and course sequencing, e.g., not allowing underprepared students in reading to take reading intensive history courses without first successfully completing developmental reading courses or courses with supplemental help.
- Study the replacement of traditional remediation with supplemented courses and flexible content delivery systems.
- Improve the quality of data collection so that remediation can be better tracked, especially the results of on-campus placement exams.

In addition to these important policy issues, existing efforts will be reviewed for additional opportunities to support the preparation of all freshmen entering Kentucky's postsecondary education system. The Council is involved in a wide array of projects to enrich student success with middle and high school programs, with college freshmen, and through the professional development of Kentucky's teacher workforce.

## **Student Preparation**

The renewal of GEAR UP grant program funds will provide enrichment activities for significantly more low income middle school students through collaborations with multiple state partners including education agencies, postsecondary institutions, businesses, and other organizations.

The Kentucky Statewide Public Postsecondary Placement Policy in English and Mathematics clearly documents the preparation needed to place in credit-bearing courses in a Kentucky public college or university. High school guidance counselors and teachers can use these guidelines as measures of secondary student preparation for college.

The Council will continue to work at all levels to support the Kentucky Department of Education's recent efforts to implement a more rigorous high school curriculum and college readiness assessment plans for middle and high school students.

Finally, the Council has included several additional initiatives in its 2006-08 budget request designed to improve the preparation of P-12 students for college (e.g., additional funding for the Kentucky Early Math Placement Test, the Kentucky Academy of Math and Science, and funding for the joint budget proposals with the Kentucky Department of Education and the Education Professional Standards Board).

## **College Student Development**

The 2006 Kentucky Conference on Developmental Education will take place in Lexington March 13 and 14 making national level experts available to institutional teams for review and planning for underprepared student programs. A State ACT Council is being organized with membership from several education partners to provide another communication forum to address critical P-16 education transition issues.

## **Teacher Preparation**

The Teacher Quality Summit continues to be a highly successful statewide meeting of deans and faculty from the colleges of arts and sciences and education that provides access to best practice teacher preparation initiatives. In 2005, over 225 Kentucky educators attended the summit to focus on the recruitment, preparation, and professional development of mathematics, science, and world language teachers, as well as the preparation and professional development of educational leaders.

Council and university representatives are participating in the Governor's Educator Work Group to develop high-quality professional development programs for P-12 educators along with activities currently underway, in consultation with EPSB and the Southern Regional Education Board, to follow up on the Commonwealth Collaborative of School Leadership Program recommendations for effective education leadership development.

Research has shown that an effective principal is a key component of achieving a high-performing school. As part of the Council's 2006-08 budget priorities, \$2 million were requested to fund the Kentucky Principal Leadership Institute. This program is a unique opportunity to prepare a new generation of school leaders, committed to effective teaching and enhancing student learning.

Additionally, the Council continues to manage the Improving Educator Quality grant program focused on increasing the academic achievement of all students through professional development initiatives that ensure P-12 teachers and administrators are highly qualified in math, science, and world languages.

# Underprepared Students in Kentucky: A First Look at the 2001 Mandatory Placement Policy

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

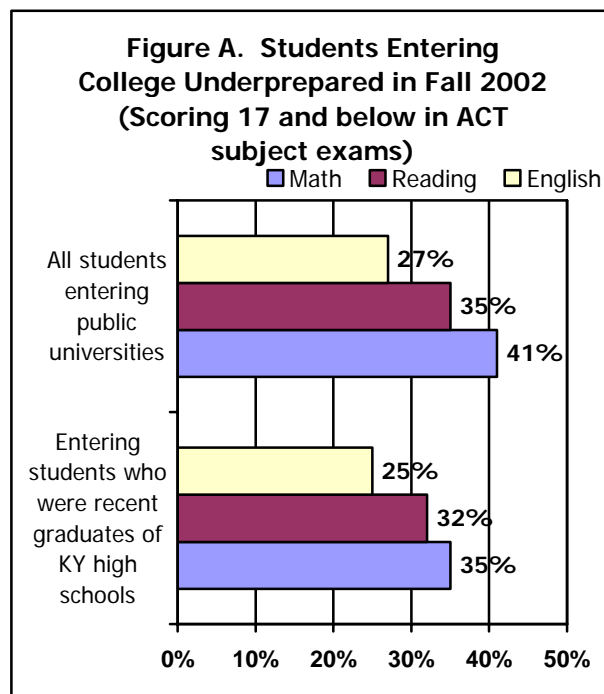
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education  
November, 2005

In fall 2001, Kentucky instituted a placement policy mandating that all students entering undergraduate programs at public institutions who receive a score of 17 or below on ACT subject exams in math, English or reading be placed in remedial coursework or receive supplemental help in those subjects. This study examines the incoming class from fall 2002 and follows them through their first two years of postsecondary study, examining their remedial needs, their remedial course-taking, and their retention to the second year.

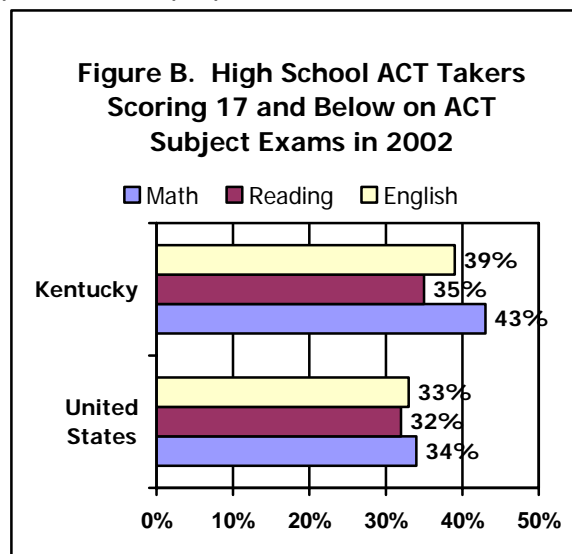
The data used in this report are administrative data submitted as student-unit records by the public postsecondary institutions to the Council's Comprehensive Database during the 2002-03 and 2003-04 academic years. The report is based on descriptive statistics about the 26,646 students who entered Kentucky's public two and four-year institutions in the fall of 2002 as full or part-time students seeking degrees or other credentials, and for whom CPE received the ACT, SAT or on-campus placement exam scores needed to classify their preparation level.

### How underprepared for postsecondary study was Kentucky's college entry cohort of 2002?

This question helps gauge the degree of remedial services that postsecondary institutions need to provide for their students. The number of entering students needing remediation is also seen as a measure of the quality of Kentucky's P-12 education system, although this is not quite true. An incoming college class includes students who graduated from high schools in other states,



earned GEDs, or were adult students who graduated from Kentucky high schools before recent educational reforms. To help answer this important policy question, Figure A above presents the preparation levels of the entire

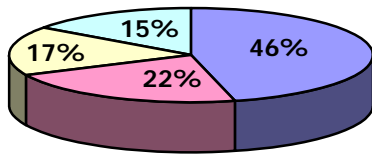


fall 2002 entry cohort and of the subset who graduated from Kentucky high schools in 2001 or 2002. These recent high school graduates make up 63 percent of the total entry cohort. National data is also presented for comparison in Figure B.

Overall, a slim majority of 54 percent of students who entered certificate and degree programs at Kentucky's public institutions of higher education in fall 2002 were under-prepared for college-level study in at least one subject. Many of these under-prepared students were underprepared in more than one subject as can be seen below.

**Figure C. Depth of Remedial Needs, Entire Public College Entry Cohort 2002**

■ Prepared  
 ■ Underprepared in one subject  
 ■ Underprepared in two subjects  
 ■ Underprepared in all three subjects



There was wide variation in preparation level among the institutions due to their differing missions and student selectivity, ranging from 15 percent at UK to 85 percent at KSU. Demographically, non-traditional students and students from some racial-ethnic minority groups were much less well prepared for college-level study than their peers (see table 4 in the full report for details).

### How underprepared were recent graduates of Kentucky high schools?

Recent graduates of Kentucky high schools were slightly better prepared for college than was the entire entry cohort in 2002. Overall, slightly less than half (48 percent) were underprepared in at least one

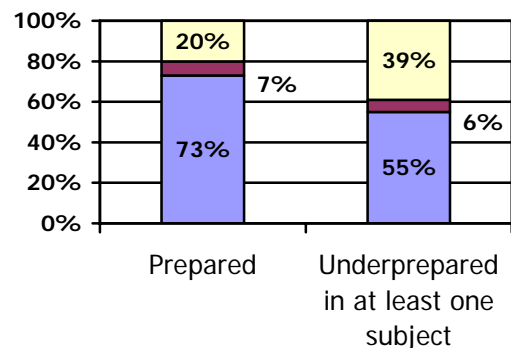
subject, and 29 percent were underprepared in two or three subjects, compared to 32 percent in the college entry cohort as whole. Looking at Figure B, college entrants who were recent graduates of Kentucky high schools compared favorably to ACT takers nationally, although ACT, Inc. counsels against making this kind of comparison given the wide demographic differences between states.

### Were underprepared students retained?

Students who came to college underprepared were less likely to return for their second year. Systemwide, nearly three-quarters of prepared students came back for a second year of study at the institution where they started, compared to slightly over half of those who were underprepared in at least one subject (Figure D). Also, underprepared students were twice as likely to drop out of college altogether as were those who were prepared: 39 percent compared to 20 percent.

**Figure D. Student Retention by Level of Preparation**

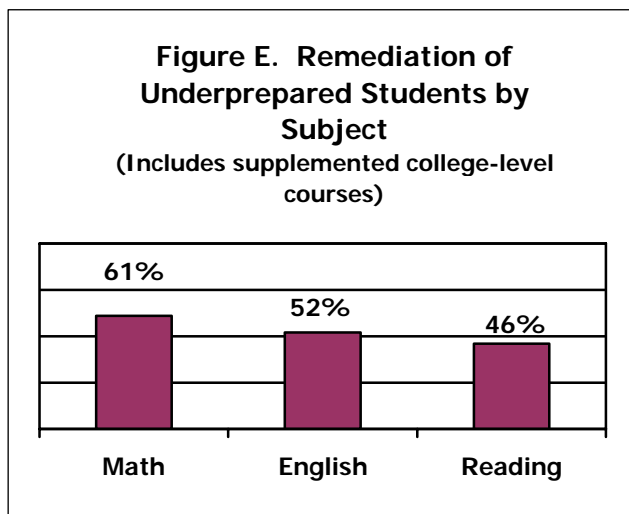
■ Dropped out  
 ■ Retained elsewhere in system  
 ■ Retained at starting institution



Students who were underprepared in all three subjects were even less likely to be retained – only 50 percent returned for a second year of study.

## Did underprepared students take remedial courses?

Systemwide, only a slim majority of underprepared students were remediated in a given subject (Figure E). The leaders in remediation were Morehead State University, Kentucky State University and Eastern Kentucky University, who each remediated between 82 – 95 percent of their underprepared students. Other schools had lower remediation rates, the lowest remediating only 40 percent of their retained, underprepared students in a given subject by the end of their second year. These numbers do not include students who received tutoring and



other forms of academic support not tracked in remedial course data. Supplemented college-level courses that meet the requirements of the Mandatory Placement Policy are included where that data was available.

While this remediation picture looks poor, it is important to note that these numbers undercount the actual remediation rates because this report does not include on-campus placement exam data from the four-year institutions. Students who enter

with low ACT or SAT scores have an opportunity to place out of remediation by passing on-campus placement exams, which would reclassify them as “prepared.” Institutions were not required to collect and submit the results of these exams in the 2002 reporting year. Consequently, this analysis does not reflect the reclassification of students who placed out of remediation by taking on-campus placement exams. Also, some schools did not report supplemented college-level courses in 2002, so these remedial efforts are not included here.

Despite the limitations of this data, Council staff believes it is necessary to highlight these remediation rates because they measure the crux of the Council’s mandatory placement policy: are underprepared students receiving the help they need to succeed? The Council is committed to pursuing excellence in the provision of services to academically at-risk students, and accountability is essential to this endeavor.

This report examines the college preparation level and remediation of the postsecondary entering class of fall 2002. Some institutions have made substantial changes in their remediation policies since the academic years covered in this report. Also, CPE has been working to improve its data collection concerning remediation and academic supplementation. The Council will continue to evaluate these remedial policies and programs, and hopes to look in more depth at the outcomes of underprepared students in the future.